



January 25, 2000

Ms. Bonnie Lee Goldstein
Bickerstaff, Heath, Smiley, Pollan,
Kever & McDaniel, L.L.P.
1700 Frost Bank Plaza
816 Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-2443

OR2000-0304

Dear Ms. Goldstein:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 131903.

The City of Highland Village (the “city”) received a request for “the name or phone or address of person complaining about a tree house built on my vacant lot.” You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” The Texas courts have recognized the informer’s privilege. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). It protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided that the subject of the information does not already know the informer’s identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The informer’s privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar criminal penalties to “administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres.” Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing Wigmore, Evidence, § 2374m at 767 (McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990),

515 at 4-5 (1988). The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

In this instance you have not indicated whether the city has either "the duty of inspection or of law enforcement within its particular sphere" to address the complaint made. Additionally, you do not address or provide information that would allow this office to assess whether there existed a violation or suspicion of a violation of a criminal or civil statute as required when claiming the informer's privilege under section 552.101 of the Government Code. Therefore, we have determined that section 552.101 does not apply, and the city must release the requested information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

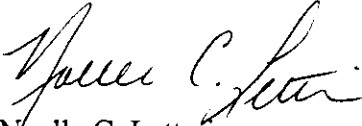
This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Noelle C. Letteri".

Noelle C. Letteri
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ncl/nc

Ref: ID# 131903

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Lee Holtzman
303 Lake Vista South
Highland Village, Texas 75067
(w/o enclosures)